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**Innovative Exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery
Showcases the Art of Contemporary Aboriginal Artists
BEAT NATION: ART, HIP HOP AND ABORIGINAL CULTURE
February 25 to June 3, 2012**

VANCOUVER, BC – Surprising and often provocative, *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* is an innovative exhibition featuring the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists from across the continent. Opening on February 25th at the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Beat Nation* presents a generation of artists who juxtapose urban youth culture with Aboriginal identity in fresh and unexpected ways. Drawing on hip hop and other forms of popular culture, artists create new cultural hybrids – in painting, sculpture, installation, performance and video – that reflect the experiences of Aboriginal people today.

More than 20 artists located across North America are represented in this major new exhibition. United by a passion to express their contemporary reality, the artists come from Aleut, Apache, Cree, Haida, Inuit, Lakota, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Navajo, Tsimshian, and many other communities. While this exhibition takes its starting point from hip hop, it branches out to include artists who use pop culture, graffiti, fashion and other aspects of urban life in combination with more traditional forms of Aboriginal expression. From the experimental videos of Alaska-based artist Nicholas Galanin, to the carved skateboards of Jordan Bennett in Newfoundland, to the striking sculptures of internationally acclaimed BC-based artists Brian Jungen and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Beat Nation* challenges the viewer to see Aboriginal culture in a variety of ways. Other artists in the exhibition are Jackson 2bears, KC Adams, Sonny Assu, Bear Witness, Raymond Boisjoly, Corey Bulpitt and Larissa Healey, Kevin Lee Burton, Dana Claxton, Dustinn Craig, Shawn Hunt, Maria Hupfield, Mark Igloliorte, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Duane Linklater, madeskimo, Dylan Miner, Kent Monkman, Marianne Nicolson, Skeena Reece, Hoka Skenandore, Rolande Soulière, and Ostwelve. By bringing these diverse artists together, *Beat Nation* reveals the artistic strategies between those working in vastly different places, in vastly different ways.

As Aboriginal identity and cultures continue to shift and transform, and older traditions find renewed meaning in new forms of expression, one thing remains constant: a commitment to politics, to storytelling, to Aboriginal languages, to the land and rights.

“This art sings, screams, whispers, beats a drum and proclaims our presence,” says Secwepemc co-curator Tania Willard, “*Beat Nation* shows, despite the many efforts to repress and eradicate our culture, that we are here. And we are thriving. Like the beats of our sacred drums, we echo our ancestors in the expression of culture regardless of medium: whether electronic beats or drum skins, natural pigments or neon spray cans, beads or bling, break dancing or



Skeena Reece, *Raven: On the Colonial Fleet*, 2010. C-print. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sebastian Kriete.

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ceremonial dancing, we do it as an expression of who we are, as indigenous peoples.”

Since the early 1990s, hip hop has been a driving force of activism for urban aboriginal youth, and Vancouver is a particularly vital centre of this movement.

“Aboriginal hip hop has become an important forum for storytelling, indigenous languages and political activism,” says co-curator Kathleen Ritter, “We see artists using similar strategies in the visual arts, by appropriating mainstream pop culture to reflect Aboriginal identity. This is what *Beat Nation* reflects.”

“Building on the spectacular success of previous exhibitions such as *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, *Beat Nation* is part of the Gallery’s commitment to showcasing the work of Aboriginal artists,” says Gallery director Kathleen Bartels, “The Gallery is particularly committed to featuring young artists and *Beat Nation* adds to the list of exhibitions such as *How Soon is Now: Contemporary Art from Here*, the *NEXT* series and others which have brought attention to the work of talented young artists. It is particularly appropriate that this ground-breaking exhibition be presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery.”

Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and is based on an initiative of grunt gallery in 2008, which brought together artists, musicians and performers exploring the relationship between Aboriginal art and hip hop. *Beat Nation* is co-curated by Kathleen Ritter, Associate Curator, Vancouver Art Gallery and Tania Willard, a Secwepemc artist, designer and curator.

[Beat Nation co-curators Kathleen Ritter and Tania Willard will lead a tour of the exhibition at a media preview taking place at 9am on Thursday, February 23rd. A number of artists will also be in attendance. Media are invited to RSVP to Carolyn Jack.](#)

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Photographs for publication are available on request.

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Nicholas Galanin, *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan (We Will Again Open This Container of Wisdom Which Has Been Left in Our Care)* part 1 & 2, 2011, video stills. Courtesy of the artist.